

ABORIGINAL ROCK ENGRAVINGS NEAR ROCKY SCRUB CREEK,  
JUNCTION VIEW, SOUTHEAST QUEENSLAND:  
TRYON'S PIGEON CREEK SITE RE-RECORDED

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ABSTRACT

Rock engravings near Rocky Scrub Creek southeast Queensland were re-recorded. Linear, non-figurative in style, they are marginally related to other sites east of the Great Dividing Range between 24° and 30° south.

Rock engravings are found in a small sandstone rock shelter situated above the right bank of Rocky Scrub Creek, a non-perennial watercourse running into Black Duck Creek, part of the Lockyer Creek-Brisbane River drainage system. The site is located approximately 97 km (60 miles) south-southwest of Brisbane at the base of the Great Dividing Range (Fig. 1). The map reference is Australia 1 : 63,600, *Liverpool Range*, 254 487. At this point, there is a relatively easy access route over the main range to Hirstglen on the Darling Downs. This track was still frequented by local aboriginal groups in the early 1840's, during the initial period of European settlement in the Gatton-Grantham district.

Early in 1884 Henry Tryon, at that time Assistant Curator of the Queensland Museum, visited the site on what was then referred to as Pigeon Creek. His graphic record at a scale of 1 inch to 1 foot and accompanying paper were published by the newly constituted Royal Society of Queensland in the same year (Tryon, 1884).

In addition to this early record of aboriginal parietal art, Tryon apparently performed what was perhaps the first archaeological excavation in Queensland. He removed enough spoil ' . . . of sufficient quantity to fill a large cart,' (Tryon, 1884, p. 46). Present ground level which is 30 cm lower than that described in 1884 appears to confirm this statement. He recovered a quantity of material comprising freshwater mollusc and snail shells, reptile and marsupial bones, and stone implements eight of which were illustrated (Tryon, 1884, pl. 13). Unfortunately none of this excavated material has survived; there is no record of it ever having been incorporated into the Queensland Museum's anthropological collections.

At some date before 1964 (Colliver, 1970, p. 9), the engravings were covered over with white paint by some misguided person interested in their preservation; thus effectively obscuring the actual arrangement of the art and misrepresenting individual designs. Accordingly it was decided that the paint should be removed by specialists from the Queensland Museum. This task was carried out under the supervision of the late Malcolm

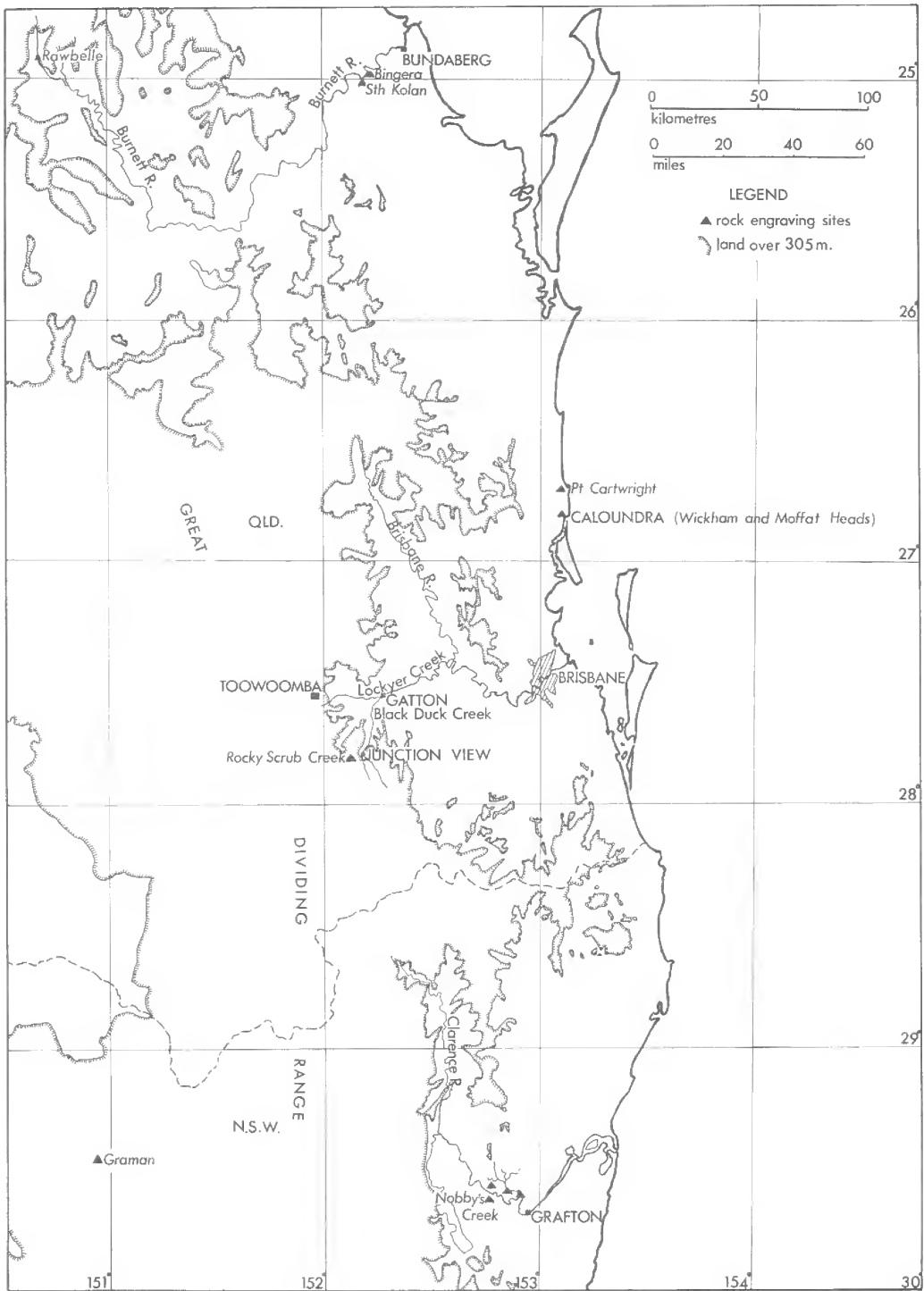


FIG. 1: Map of southeast Queensland and northern New South Wales showing rock engraving sites.

McAnna in October 1969. On successful completion of this process, it was noted that Tryon's record could only be termed a freehand sketch, albeit to scale, and that his record differed in a number of matters of detail from the original.

Recording was then undertaken, initially with a portable grid and scale drawings, and later by tracing with a felt pen on clear polythene sheets. A photographic survey using colour transparencies and monochrome film taken with oblique flash was also completed. All the above methods were used in the compilation of the final graphic record presented here (Fig. 4).

References to Tryon's paper have been included in a number of surveys and reports concerned with Australian aboriginal parietal art (Davidson, 1936; Elkin, 1949; McBryde, 1964; McCarthy, 1967; Colliver, 1970). Details from his record were reproduced by two of these authors, but in one case the selection was published upside down (Davidson, 1936, fig. 6) and in the other, one detail appears sideways (Elkin, 1949, fig. 3e top). Publication of a more accurate record was therefore thought desirable.

## DESCRIPTION

### THE SITE

Seven slabs of thickly bedded, medium grained sub-labile to siliceous sandstone of the Upper Marburg beds (typical of the Mount Sylvia-Lockyer Valley region) combine to form a rock shelter with a sheer vertical face suitable for decoration. The texture of the sandstone renders it easy to abrade or puncture.

The site faces northwest and is situated 10 metres distant and 4 metres above the level of the creek bed (Fig. 2). Bone fragments, quartzite, chert and common opal waste flakes, and other remains from the habitation deposit are still strewn over the steep slope. It is probable that Tryon's excavation did not plumb the depths of the site. However, evidence of recent illegal excavations leaves little chance of finding much undisturbed deposit. The total length of the sandstone structure is 14.75 metres. The collapse of an immense sandstone slab has reduced the dimensions of the art and habitation area to a length of 9.40 metres and a maximum depth of 3.00 metres (Fig. 3). Ceiling height varies from 2.25 to 3.50 metres.

### THE ROCK ENGRAVINGS

A kaleidoscopic frieze of engravings extending over an area of approximately 12 square metres covers the main vertical face of the sandstone wall. The upper edge of the decorated area is 2.20 metres and the lower 75 cm above extant ground level.

**TECHNIQUE:** Three distinct engraving techniques have been utilized; drilling, abrasion, and pecking or pounding.

**Drilled:** By the simple act of continuously rotating a sharp implement, a round or oval hole ranging from 10 to 50 mm in diameter and 12 to 20 mm in depth was produced. Two hundred and sixty-eight drilled holes are scattered either singly or occasionally in pairs. Some have been incorporated into larger curvilinear designs. Their greatest concentration is restricted to the lower part of the decorated surface.

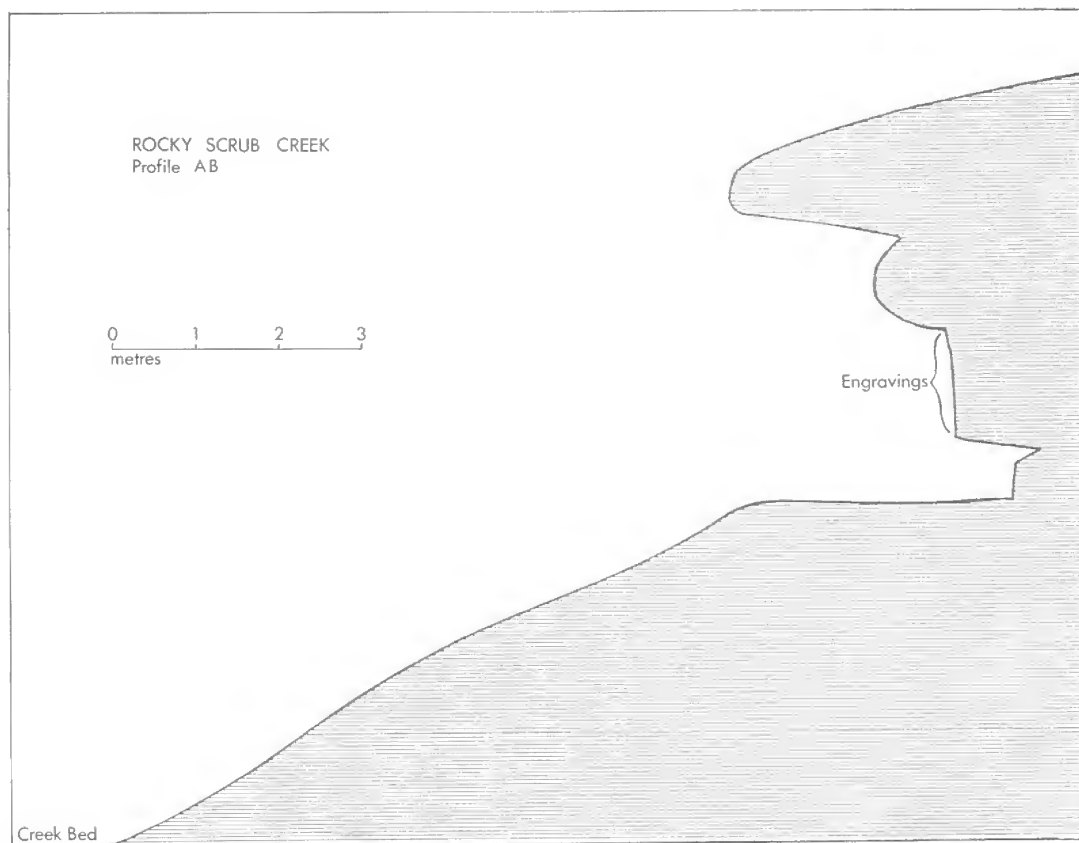


FIG. 2: Profile of Rocky Scrub Creek rock shelter.

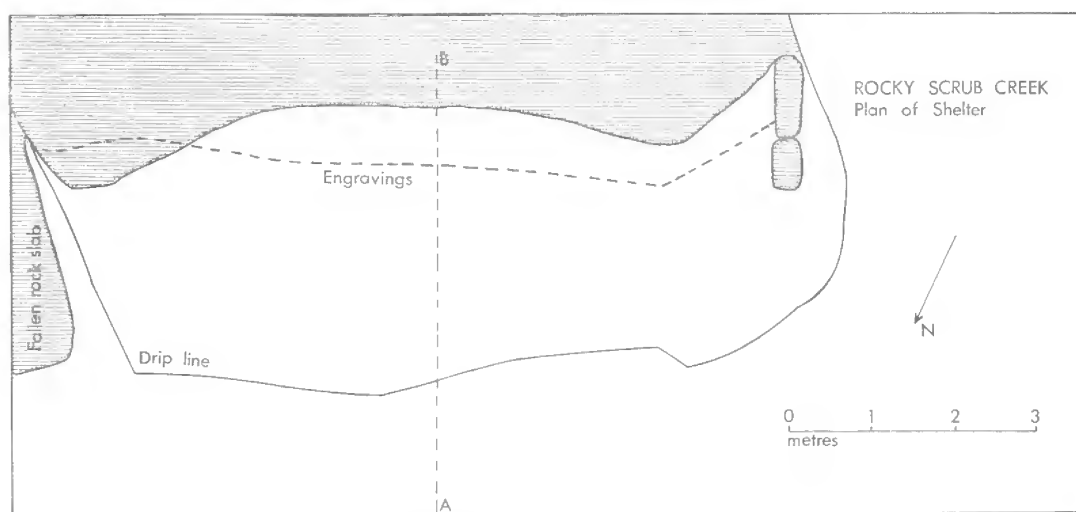


FIG. 3: Plan of Rocky Scrub Creek rock shelter.

Abraded: Abraded grooves with a U-shaped cross-section are formed by repeated rubbing with an appropriate implement. They are usually 10 to 15 mm in width and 8 to 13 mm in depth. Such grooves are generally used in outline designs, although simple, vertical linear grooves are also present.

Pecked: In this instance the grooves are manufactured by pounding or pecking with a stone or other implement. A series of contiguous rows of shallow indentations are combined to form a continuous groove. This technique is used for individual designs and also in association with abraded grooves. Scattered groups of individual pecked dots also occur.

STYLE: The Rocky Scrub Creek engravings are mainly linear, non-figurative in style. Consequently there is a wide range of variety in design; although on closer examination a number of basic recurrent circular and curvilinear designs appear. Table 1 indicates the relative frequency of design categories.

TABLE 1  
FREQUENCY OF DESIGNS

Category	No.	Percentage
Single drilled holes .. .. .	240	61.86
Simple linear grooves .. .. .	54	14.43
Tracks .. .. .	18	4.65
Ovals .. .. .	3	0.77
Ovals + interior design .. .. .	6	1.55
Inverted 'U' .. .. .	1	0.26
Inverted 'U's + interior design .. .. .	8	2.06
Other curvilinear designs .. .. .	20	5.15
Other designs .. .. .	38	8.77
Total .. .. .	388	100.00

The visually most prominent designs are the inverted 'U's and ovals (Fig. 4, a-e). As a result of their size and position they completely dominate the numerically superior single drilled holes and simple linear grooves. Grooved outline tracks form a small but distinct representational group that is conspicuous among the non-figurative designs.

DISCUSSION

Evidence for engraved parietal art in coastal southeast Queensland and northern New South Wales east of the Great Dividing Range is meagre. Known sites are relatively rare.

Engravings occur on numerous isolated boulders in the bed of the Burnett River at Bingera in the Bundaberg district, 312 km (194 miles) north of the Rocky Scrub Creek shelter (Fig. 1). These have been known since at least 1876, and Tryon referred to them and illustrated some details in his original paper (1884, p. 48, pl. 12). R. H. Mathews (1901, p. 57) reported similar engravings in the bed of the same river near South Kolan 7.2 km

(4.5 miles) to the southwest.\* This group had also been known to local residents since the early 1870's. Despite both published reports, neither site was adequately recorded. This has now been rectified at South Kolan, where a survey has been carried out by the Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs because the site will soon disappear under the waters of a new dam.

Another engraved site on one of the Burnett River headwaters at Rawbelle Station 354 km (220 miles) north-northwest of Rocky Scrub Creek was also reported by Mathews (1901, p. 58). These engravings were similar in style and technique to those at Bingera and South Kolan. Several designs, tracks, drilled holes and ovals, are common to Rocky Scrub Creek and the Burnett River sites. At the latter sites a different technique has been used; designs are more varied and complex, and representational designs such as weapons and human feet are present.

G. K. Jackson (1939, p. 291) referred to the existence of engravings on coastal sandstone platforms at Point Cartwright and Caloundra (Moffat and Wickham Heads) some 145 km (90 miles) northeast of Rocky Scrub Creek (Fig. 1). By 1939 these had all been weathered away by wind and sea action. Although Jackson noted that the designs included kangaroo and dingo paws, and human and emu feet, no record or illustration was ever published. Except for the emu feet (tracks) which also appear at Rocky Scrub Creek these two sites are perhaps more closely related to those on the Burnett River.

In northern New South Wales about 206 km (128 miles) south of Rocky Scrub Creek (Fig. 1), Professor Isabel McBryde has recorded a number of art sites in the Clarence River valley near Grafton (McBryde, 1962, 1964). Included are shelters containing engravings at Seelands, Whiteman Creek, Upper Copmanhurst and Nobby's Creek, Copmanhurst. The latter is the most closely related to Rocky Scrub Creek, a fact already noted by Etheridge (1904, p. 272) and McBryde (1964, p. 207). Both sites share the basic inverted 'U' design, in simple form at Nobby's Creek and a much more elaborate form at Rocky Scrub Creek.

It is apparent that the Rocky Scrub Creek site while not closely related, can at least be marginally grouped with other engraved sites east of the Great Dividing Range between latitudes 24° and 30° south. The style at this site is easily distinguishable from the more elaborate engraved art styles on the western side of the Great Dividing Range as shown at Graman in northern New South Wales (McBryde, 1968, pl. 6B) and the central highlands of Queensland, notably in the Carnarvon Range, Upper Maranoa, and Upper Warrego Rivers. Again it is quite distinct from the outline figured art of the Sydney-Hawkesbury district.

Many of the features that appear to characterise rock engraving sites throughout the continent (Edwards, 1971, p. 358), such as proximity to a water supply, an occupation deposit, and heavy patination are present at Rocky Scrub Creek. The relative frequencies of design (Table 1) are not consistent with Edwards's central and south Australian sites (1971, p. 362, table 24 : 1), but this would be expected of an east coast site.

Chronologically the pecked technique is more recent than the abraded. In two cases pecked designs are partly superimposed over an earlier abraded design; in both instances they are placed within a grooved outline inverted 'U' (Fig. 4, a-b). Elsewhere existing

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\* It is possible that Bingera and South Kolan are the same site, no precise location was given by Tryon who did not visit the area himself.



abraded grooves are extended or joined together by pecked grooves. Patination in the pecked grooves is in general lighter in colour than in the abraded grooves.

Tryon's record indicates that with one exception, there has been little natural deterioration in the condition of the engravings over the period 1884 to 1972. The engraved surface is well sheltered and protected from rain and wind action. The area from which one small fragment had broken away before 1884 still appears relatively unweathered (Fig. 4, x). Because the edges of this exposed surface are less resistant to weathering an area of 100 cm<sup>2</sup> immediately to the right has begun to spall. It is likely to fall away in the near future.

Due to the proximity of the shelter to a mine access road the engravings have suffered greatly from the attention of European vandals. Names, initials and dates cover a large proportion of the surface, in one area completely obliterating the engravings that were present in 1884. In this respect it is pleasing to note that the Rocky Scrub Creek shelter was gazetted as a protected site under section 13 of the *Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act of 1967*, on 29 July 1971. These rock engravings therefore enjoy today, a higher degree of legal protection from human vandalism than they have had these past 87 years.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the Minister for Aboriginal and Island Affairs for granting a permit to record the site, and those members of the Queensland Museum staff who contributed their services; the late Mr M. E. McAnna, Mr A. J. Easton, Mrs C. Cameron, Mr R. G. Hardley, Miss S. Hiley, and Mrs E. L. Robinson.

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